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ESCONDIDO: High school district cuts specialist, tech director, others

Trustees reassign workers, eliminate positions to trim 2011-12 budget

By GARY WARTH - gwarth@nctimes.com | Posted: Tuesday, March 8, 2011 10:46 pm

Trustees in the Escondido Union High School District voted Tuesday to reassign or lay off a relatively small number of certificated employees to offset a projected \$7 million drop in state funds.

No full-time permanent classroom teachers were laid off, although temporary teachers in the equivalent of about 16 full-time positions were notified they would not be rehired in the 2011-12 school year. Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Steve Boyle called the action routine, and said many temporary teachers are re-hired after receiving pink slips each year.

Trustees also eliminated one special-education program specialist position, leaving another two specialists for the job in the 2011-12 school year.

In all, the board agreed to eliminate the equivalent of 4.6 full-time certificated positions to save about \$311,000. Besides the special education position, cuts included three positions in adult education and the equivalent of 1.8 positions in temporary teaching positions in math and physical science.

District technology director Sonny Portacio, who has been notified he will be reassigned to a teaching position, pleaded with the board to keep the job he has held 11 years.

Portacio reminded trustees that the district is planning to open a specialized high school, and said this is not the time to be cutting back on technology.

"I don't know what the future holds, and neither do you," he said shortly before receiving a standing ovation from one row of supporters behind him.

District officials expect to receive about \$7 million less in state funds for the 2011-12 school year than they did this year after temporary increases in vehicle license fees and sales and income taxes expire.

Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Barry Dragon said the expiration of the taxes would reduce the amount of state funding for average daily attendance by \$349, lowering the per-student funding to \$5,672 for the year.

The district has 8,500 students and three high schools, each with more than 100 teachers, plus one continuation school and one adult school.

Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed a June ballot initiative to ask voters if the taxes should be extended for five years, but school districts are required to notify teachers and other certificated employees by March 15 if they may be laid off. In recent years, many districts that laid off teachers before the deadline later rescinded the layoffs as more money became available.

After hearing Portacio speak, board President George McClure said that while the cuts were very unpleasant, they were less severe than in other districts.

"We have to protect what's going on in the classroom, and that's the bottom line," McClure said about the cuts to technology and other areas. "While the cuts we're making are very painful, the alternative is even worse. I'm sitting up here with a knot in my stomach."

Trustee Tina Pope said that although the board says it is keeping cuts away from classrooms, in reality every cut does affect students in some way.

Pope and Trustee Randy Garcia said they are eager to see a soon-to-be released study on the benefits of unifying with the Escondido Union School District.

Besides the staff reductions and reassignments Tuesday night, Dragon said the district also is looking at shifting about \$1.3 million in its budget to cover some expenses. As district officials prepare the budget for adoption by July 1, Dragon said, they are looking at cutting between \$200,000 and \$300,000 from management and from \$400,000 to \$600,000 from classified positions.

Dragon said the district has projected \$65.6 million in revenues and \$71 million in expenditures for 2011-12. The district is

projecting that it will end up with \$8 million remaining in reserves ---- about 8 percent of its budget ---- after dipping into its reserves to offset the projected deficit. The district is required by law to have reserves equal to at least 3 percent of its budget.

Dragon said the updated 2010-11 budget projects \$72.3 million in revenue, including about \$4 million in federal stimulus money, \$76.5 million in expenses and \$11.5 million in reserves.

In 2009-10, the district received \$68.4 million in revenue, spent \$75 million and ended the school year with \$15.2 million in reserves.

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